

TechHumans Blog

Exploring the Human Side of Technical Work

by Keith R. Bennett

Corey Haines' Excellent Adventure (Interview)

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Our first post is a voice interview I did with Corey Haines in Dulles, Virginia, on August 18, 2011.

You can download it [here](#) or listen to it using the player below:

0:00

In the first part of the interview Corey tells us about his inspiring and unconventional journey, which began with, of all things, being fired from his job. He immediately picked himself up and planned his next move. Thinking outside the box, he set out to teach and learn from his colleagues in the technical community, starting with David Chelimsky of RSpec fame. That is, he *literally* set out, visiting them for up to a week at a time, sleeping on couches, absorbing their wisdom, passing it on to the next people and offering some of his own. Corey is now an internationally known and respected member of the Ruby community, leading code retreats all over the world.

In the second part Corey shares his observations about organizations, teams, and individuals in the workplace. Here are some of my favorite quotes from it:

“...most of the companies that I really admire, they don’t call it agile, they just call it software development, so for the techniques that XP has, they wouldn’t *dream* of not doing automated testing, because that’s irresponsible for your client. Now, they do it and they learn about it, they find pain points with it, and instead of abandoning it, they inspect it. Are we potentially doing it wrong, are we potentially doing it in an immature fashion, are we doing it in a way that we can fix, and so they’re constantly inspecting.”

“You can bring inexperienced people in, but don’t put them in a corner and have them sit there hacking out code. Bring inexperienced people in and treat them as equals, treat them as people that you’re mentoring, treat them with respect, and they’ll strive to do that, and if they don’t you cut them. If they’re not that kind, then you get rid of them and you bring in the people who *are* of that nature.”

“I think the most effective way [of collaborating], which does not mean it’s the *only* effective way is big open room, big huge monitors, live input devices for everybody, so two keyboards, two mice on a machine.”

“The companies that ate together that would either bring lunch in or people would go out and bring it back or they would go out in groups of six or something, but if you eat together, it just was wonderful because you got in in the morning and it was your family that you spent the day with...those places I loved. It just breeds that excitement about it, and it breeds responsibility, and the better you know your teammates, and the more affection you have for them, the less you want to let them down, and you’re willing to work on your own skills to that you *don’t* let them down.”

(Q: “In the places you’ve encountered that have been the most productive and successful, what are the leaders like?”) “I think they all seem to be very engaged, they all seem to like the people, they want the people to be happy, and they tend to be engaged in the day to day stuff. Either they’re actually sitting on the floor with people working, or they are in there a lot, or they are in the meetings a lot, but they tend to be very engaged, and have a good philosophy about both software and people.”

...and my favorite one:

“Software development is a very social activity.”

I hope you enjoy listening to this interview as much as I did (several times).

- Keith

Audio Sections

00:20 – The adventures of Corey Haines and traveling around the world

02:00 – Tendencies to work in a very insulated community

03:05 – Finding people and having them find you

12:30 – All of the above stemmed from a “negative event”: getting fired

16:25 – Establishing a reputation within the Agile community

19:40 – Corey and Ruby

23:50 – Different ways of doing things/insights

28:07 – Hiring the best people for a job

29:45 – Effective ways of collaborating

32:15 – Who to pair with and when

33:35 – People who resist pair programming

37:06 – Leadership

38:08 – Learning new technology to do your job

44:40 – Where is Corey today (as of interview, August 2011)?

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